



Laura and Jay Parker at home with Spot, one of their dogs.

HUMANE NATURE

AS COCHAIRS OF THIS MONTH'S INAUGURAL CELEBRATING ANIMALS MIAMI GALA, **LAURA AND JAY PARKER'S** LOVE OF ALL CREATURES DRIVES THEIR DEDICATION TO THE HUMANE SOCIETY. **BY LAUREN BROWN**

Since meeting 10 years ago, now husband and wife Jay and Laura Parker filled their lives with a shared passion for philanthropy. But it's Laura's unwavering dedication to the protection and care of animals that's the cause nearest and dearest to their hearts.

Growing up in Italy, Laura's exposure to animals was most often to those that ended up on the dinner table—a memory that inspired her to become a vegetarian nearly 14 years ago. Around that same time, Laura bought a dog, Astro, from a pet store and found her life's calling: helping animals that can't help themselves. "I bought Astro because I didn't know about shelters then," says Laura. "I'm 100 percent convinced he was from a puppy mill. He had problems from the day that I brought him home—skin problems, health issues. My devotion started with Astro, and then it allowed me to help other dogs in need. I started to volunteer at local shelters and get involved with other animal organizations."

And so, it was a natural evolution for the Parkers to become intimately

involved with the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). The organization doesn't just provide funds for temporary fixes to problems like puppy mills, fighting pits, hoarders, neglect, and natural disasters; as Laura points out, the HSUS takes the time to educate the public and take on issues like animal abuse and wildlife rehabilitation head on. Most importantly, "it changes laws and fights for all kinds of animals," she says.

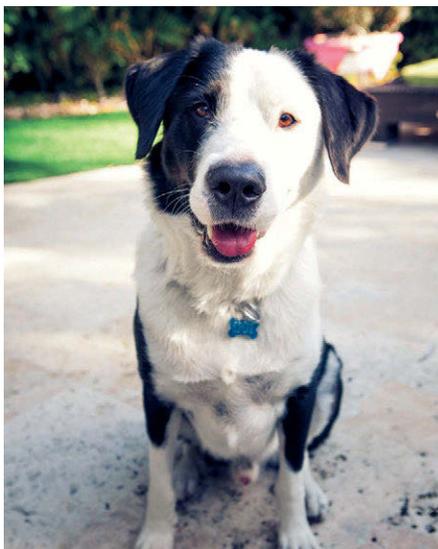
This month, the Parkers will be cochairing the HSUS's inaugural Celebrating Animals/Confronting Cruelty Miami event on March 27 as part of the organization's mission to educate and inspire others. The event's leadership committee is an impressive group of Miami power players (and animal enthusiasts), including activist/model/socialite Amanda Hearst and international designer Tui Pranich. Celebrities such as Ellen DeGeneres, Portia de Rossi, and Kesha round out the Honorary Committee.

During the event, guests will be treated to programming that further

CONTINUED ON PAGE 158



The HSUS held a gala at the Breakers in Palm Beach for its campaign against puppy mills last January. RIGHT: Spot, one of the Parker family's rescue dogs.



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—LAURA PARKER

explains what HSUS does and the effectiveness of legislation presented to Congress and the Senate, and provide information on the animal protection the organization offers both locally and around the globe. However, there will be plenty of time to mingle as well, with a cocktail reception, a gourmet vegan dining experience, and a performance by jazz singer Nicole Henry on the agenda.

Laura's intense devotion to animal rights is something Jay hopes is contagious among the event's attendees. "Laura's compassion for animals is really extraordinary," says Jay, the CEO of Florida brokerage at Douglas Elliman. In their everyday life, the couple might rescue birds during a torrential downpour or hold up traffic to save a stranded animal.

This commitment to all creatures is something they've passed along to their two children by regularly fostering animals at home. "Laura basically took half of the garage and turned it into a day care center with air-conditioning and television. The dogs that Laura rescues have television because she thinks they actually watch it," says Jay. "Probably

just in our home alone we've rescued and saved more than 20 dogs. And over the last 10 years, I would never even be able to quantify the number of animals we've rescued."

Sadly, Laura recently lost three of her dogs (including Astro), so she's taking a break from having canines as pets while she grieves. But for Christmas, Jay gave his blessing for Laura to try something new, and rescue a horse. She visits the equine in Wellington and goes riding twice a week, and Laura loves having the opportunity to teach her kids about the important connection humans and horses can have. "An animal should not live its entire life in a cage [so small] they cannot even turn around," says Laura. "If more people knew, if more people were educated [about animals], they would be able to make better choices." *The Humane Society of the United States' Celebrating Animals/Confronting Cruelty: Miami benefit takes place Friday, March 27, at The St. Regis Bal Harbour Resort, 9703 Collins Ave.; visit humanesociety.org for tickets or more information.* **OD**

ANIMAL RESCUE—BY THE NUMBERS

A look inside the HSUS South Florida Wildlife Center, a major resource for rescuing and rehabilitating animals.

- **12,000+:** Number of injured, orphaned, or imperiled animals admitted annually.
- **14,000:** Number of animals the SFWC helps in Florida overall.
- **7,000:** Number of miles per month that three animal rescue ambulances travel to serve Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade Counties.
- **255+:** Number of species of wildlife rescued and rehabilitated by the SFWC.
- **60+:** Number of SFWC staff members who team up to care for area wildlife, 365 days a year.
- **2,635:** Number of animal cruelty calls received on the HSUS tip line (1-877-TIP-HSUS) in 2014.
- **100,000+:** Number of animals HSUS affiliates provide services and hands-on care to each year.

CHARITY REGISTER

Opportunities to give.

THE CADILLAC CHAMPIONSHIP
Tee up to support The First Tee, Make-A-Wish Southern Florida, The Boys & Girls Clubs of Broward, and other local organizations at this annual celebrity golf tournament.

When: Wednesday, March 4, to Saturday, March 8

Where: Trump National Doral, 4400 NW 87th Ave., Doral

Contact: cadillacchampionship.com

WOMEN OF TOMORROW MENTOR & SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Help The Women of Tomorrow Mentor & Scholarship Program create educational, inspiring, and empowering opportunities for young women at the organization's eighth annual gala.

When: Saturday, March 7, at 6 PM

Where: TBD

Contact: womenoftomorrow.org

BASS MUSEUM OF ART

Celebrate A Night at the Museum with Miami's prominent arts patrons and philanthropists to support the initiatives of the Bass Museum of Art.

When: Wednesday, March 11, at 8 PM

Where: Bass Museum of Art, 2100 Collins Ave., Miami Beach

Contact: bassmuseum.org

AMERICAN RED CROSS

Ball chairs Marile and Jorge Luis Lopez welcome guests to the 33rd annual American Red Cross Ball, an evening of dinner, dancing, and live music that benefits the American Red Cross Greater Miami and The Keys.

When: Saturday, March 14, at 7 PM

Where: The Ritz-Carlton Key Biscayne, 455 Grand Bay Dr., Key Biscayne

Contact: redcross.org

LITTLE LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION

Join revelers for the Hearts & Stars Gala: Casablanca, an annual bash at a private Miami Beach estate to support children and families who face medical, educational, emotional, and financial challenges.

When: Saturday, March 14, at 8 PM

Where: Terra Veritatis, 4949 Pine Tree Dr., Miami Beach

Contact: heartsandstarsgala.com